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SUBJECT: ISIOLO SECURITY UPDATE

REF: A. NAIROBI 1770

[1](#)B. NAIROBI 1259

[1](#)C. NAIROBI 1242

[1](#)D. NAIROBI 1238

[1](#)E. NAIROBI 551

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Kenya's ongoing drought has exacerbated tribal and political tensions between pastoralists in Kenya's Isiolo District. The situation recently presented problems for the tourism industry in Kenya's northern corridor when armed livestock herders moved into wildlife conservation lands with their animals. While some interpreted the move as an attempt to grab what little water and pasture was left, others saw a political agenda by one group to threaten the revenue stream of another group. Regardless of the motive, some safari camps and hotels were forced to stop accepting bookings. The Ambassador and mission staff engaged with local politicians, the leadership of a USAID-funded conservation program, and others to assist, and the immediate problem has been resolved. Problems will remain, however, as long as there is poor security, ethnic based winner-take-all politics, excessive reliance on the livestock sector as a source of income, and ineffective mechanisms to govern land use. If this situation continues, Kenya's arid north will be just as vulnerable to political violence as the areas affected by the 2007-8 post-election crisis. END SUMMARY.

Pastoralists Invade National Reserves

[1](#)2. (SBU) An ongoing drought has exacerbated tensions between pastoral groups in Isiolo and Samburu Districts, located in Kenya's geographic center. Competition for scarce pasture and water is intense, and the region's different tribes have aligned against one another to secure control over valuable land and constituency votes for the next round of general elections. Relations between the Samburu and Borana tribes have been particularly strained, but other groups have become involved as well, including Rendille, Turkana, and Somalis.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In August, approximately 300 armed moran (unmarried male warriors) from the Samburu, Rendille and Turkana tribes led approximately 10,000 head of cattle and goats into Shaba and Buffalo Springs National Reserves located in the Borana area of Isiolo District. In addition to grazing their herds, which is generally permitted in many reserves managed by country councils, the moran also killed protected wildlife and shot and wounded a game guard while he was accompanying Spanish tourists on a game drive. The tourists were unharmed but departed Kenya the next day.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The Kenya Tourism Federation (KTF), alarmed at the potential damage to Kenya's tourism industry, made their concerns known to a number of government officials after it became clear that safari camps and hotels in the affected area quietly stopped taking bookings. KTF Chief Executive Officer Agatha Juma told Emboffs that if anything happened to a tourist on safari anywhere in Kenya, it

had the potential of shutting down the entire country's tourism industry. Further setbacks to tourism, she said, was something the struggling industry, struck by the global financial crisis just as it was recovering from the 2007/8 post-election violence, could ill afford. KTF made it clear that they were very close to advising their partners that Kenya's northern corridor be closed to tourists until the security situation improved.

15. (SBU) In response to complaints by Isiolo Member of Parliament (and Minister of Livestock) Mohammed Kutti, Minister of Tourism Najib Balala, and the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Minister of Internal Security George Saitoti sent a contingent of 400 security officers and eight trucks to the area to little effect. However, we heard from multiple sources that the police did not try to force - and did not even ask - anyone to leave the park. We were told they merely drove on routine patrols and made no arrests.

U.S. Encourages Dialogue, Action

16. (SBU) The ongoing drought and polarized political environment have created a situation ripe for conflict. Borana viewed the mostly Samburu invasion of their conservation lands as a deliberate attack against their tourist revenue stream, asserting that the Samburu conservation lands had not been similarly overrun. The Borana also saw the ineffectiveness of the police deployment as a deliberate slight by the (ethnic Maasai) Minister of Internal Security in favor of his fellow Maa-speaking (and Nilotic) Samburu. The Samburu, on the other hand, were still feeling bitter and victimized by the police security operation earlier this year (ref E), and claimed that all areas were overgrazed, including Samburu

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conservancies. In addition, the Samburu interpreted Borana counter-raids as the onset of a sustained attack by the Borana, who were importing fighters from the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) to wipe out the Samburu completely. (Note: The OLF is a guerilla and political organization that has been fighting against the Government of Ethiopia since 1973. The Oromo and Borana are closely related. End Note.)

17. (SBU) The Mission's USAID and Political staff convened or participated in a number of meetings with local politicians, USAID grantees, and the KTF to generate options for immediate action. The motive for the sparring groups to come together was clear: no matter the political dimensions, any closure of Kenya's northern corridor to tourism would affect both Samburu and Borana conservancies (and their respective streams of revenue) equally.

18. (SBU) The first option was to open a dialogue between the Isiolo County Council and KWS to negotiate a temporary KWS takeover to secure the Reserves. (Note: KWS does not currently administer or provide security for Shaba or Buffalo Springs National Reserves; the Isiolo County Council administers them and collects the corresponding revenues from tourist visits. End Note) While this was the option KTF favored, securing such an agreement would take time.

19. (SBU) In support of defusing the conflict, the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT), a USAID-supported umbrella organization of community conservancies (see Refs B-D), agreed on August 28 to form and deploy an inter-ethnic team of local elders to the reserves to encourage the moran to move out. This is part of a larger USAID-supported and NRT-implemented peace and reconciliation initiative that aims for a durable solution to the conflict. For example, the team would pave the way for the local politicians to appear together in front of their respective constituents to promote peace.

110. (SBU) The first step of the NRT initiative was remarkably successful. By September 19, the inter-ethnic team briefed the Ambassador that half of the moran had agreed to depart the reserves. Since then, the team has completed a second round of discussion with the moran. We have heard from both the KTF and Minister Saitoti that the reserves are now secure and a KWS takeover is no

longer necessary.

Raids/Violence Continue

¶11. (SBU) Unfortunately, the victory in Isiolo's Reserves appears to be an isolated one. Raids and violence have continued and are expected to worsen once the short rains begin and livestock become more mobile. (Note: The rains are expected imminently. End Note) The political divisions have not gone away, nor have the other underlying conditions that drive raiding behavior and land grabbing. On the contrary, the continued raiding is deepening political divisions.

¶12. (SBU) Local Members of Parliament from Samburu East and Isiolo North have appealed to the government to provide livestock to both sides to avert another round of raids. In response to a letter of concern from the Ambassador, Minister of Internal Security Saitoti replied that the Government is instead focusing on long-term interventions to cushion pastoralists during drought and working with neighboring countries on a "comprehensive disarmament exercise." There are also media reports that the Government is considering disarming the Kenya Police Reserves, or home guards, because arms handed out to such citizens are reportedly being used for cattle raiding. (Note: Disarmament exercises in Kenya do not have a strong track record of success, but the European Union has nevertheless reportedly pledged funding to support the next exercise. End Note)

¶13. (SBU) Comment: The long term way forward will depend not only on improving security, but also on evolving local perspectives on ethnic based politics and the livestock monoculture. Residents of the region will also have to find a way to deal peacefully and creatively with the continued influx into Isiolo of populations from arid regions searching for a way to make a living. We are exploring ways to help. Senior officials at the Northern Rangelands Trust assert that the way ahead lies in helping local populations find more reliable and sustainable sources of income that will help them move away from the livestock monoculture. We agree, but also see that NRT's way of dealing with Kenya's dysfunctional, byzantine, and corrupt land administration system (by admitting groups for membership that engage in conservation activities but who in some cases have no authority to control access to conservancy lands) causes its own problems. USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives

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appears to have found some success in grappling with a similar series of problems in nearby Samburu North. In doing so, they have found that the government's administrative subdivision of districts appears to drive local conflict as much as longer-term environmental, overpopulation, and migration issues.

¶14. (SBU) Comment, cont: Given the overwhelming political dimension to the current conflict, it appears that the landscape in Kenya's arid north is just as vulnerable to future political violence as other areas in Kenya affected by the 2007/8 post-election crisis. We will continue to work toward finding sustainable solutions for the people of this troubled region.
HOZA